DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 343 692 PS 020 409

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TITLE Child Care Facilities in Public Schools Benefit Students, Schools, Communities and Children.
INSTITUTION Vanderbilt Univ., Nashville, TN. Peabody Coll.
PUB DATE 90
NOTE 15p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (Opinion/Position Papers, Essays, etc.) (120) -- Information Analyses (070)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academic Achievement; Child Caregivers; Community Benefits; Community Support; *Day Care Centers; Dropout Prevention; *Early Parenthood; Employer Supported Day Care; High School Graduates; *High Schools; High School Students; Internship Programs; *Parent Education; *Parenthood Education; Preschool Education; Public Health; *Public Schools; Social Services; Vocational Education; Welfare Recipients

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses public school-based child care facilities and the ways in which they benefit students, schools, communities, and children. It is argued that when there are child care centers in public high schools, teen-age parents whose children attend the facility are more likely to complete their education and less likely to become dependent on welfare. Schools benefit through lower dropout rates, improved parent education programs, vocational training for students, and increased performance from faculty who enroll their children in the facility. Communities profit from having a lower number of welfare participants; more efficient use of public health, nutrition, and social services; and more accessible high quality child care. The child care profession gains trained professionals, and all the children involved benefit from a high quality preschool education. Concerns relating to the continuity of child caregivers; community support; and planning, supervision, and coordination of resources are addressed. A list of 26 references is appended. (Author/GLR)

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CHILD CARE FACILITIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS BENEFIT STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN

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Running Head: School Child Care

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CHILD CARE FACILITIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN

Abstract

By providing child care centers in the public schools, teen age parents will be more likely to complete their education and less likely to become welfare dependent. Schools benefit through lower dropout rates, improved parent education programs, vocational training for students, and increased performance from less anxious faculty who enroll their children in the facility. Communities profit from fewer welfare participants, improved efficiency of use of public health, nutrition and social services as well as from more accessible quality child care. The child care profession gains trained professionals and all of the children benefit from a quality preschool education.

CHILD CARE FACILITIES IN PUBLIC SCHOOLS CAN BENEFIT STUDENTS, SCHOOLS, COMMUNITIES AND CHILDREN

Problems can usually be solved in several different ways, and occasionally the solution to one problem provides answers to another. Educators have an opportunity to solve several problems with a single simple solution that can be cost effective and will have positive long term effects on students, children, schools and communities. What magic solution can solve several of society's ills?

Not magic, but placing child care centers in some of our public schools would provide vital necessary services, including quality child care, improve the future of the child care profession and reduce welfare costs.

Several groups would benefit from public sponsored child care centers housed in high schools. Each group contributes to the effort, but in most situations, the contribution would be unused resources or would be offset by contributions from existing Federal or state programs so that no group would feel a burden and yet benefits would be high for each contributor. Each group that would benefit and their contributions will be discussed separately.

Teenage parents and their offspring: This is one of society's concerns that can be improved by child care being made available at local high schools. Young girls who become pregnant in spite of parent education efforts, need an opportunity to complete

their high school education (Field, 1981; Roosa, 1986; Roosa & Vaughn, 1983) and a chance for job training (Colletta, Gregg, Hadler, Lee, & Mekelburg, 1980; Sung, 1981). These students typically are unsuccessful students who would gain from vocational training (Hahn, 1987; Roosa, 1986) and they lack support networks that enable them to be effective parents (Colletta, Gregg, Hadler, Lee, & Mekelburg, 1980; Marx, 1987), yet many programs for teenage mothers do not provide child care or limit the time children can attend a child care facility sponsored by the program. One study indicates that only 11% of programs for teen parents offer child care (Marx, 1987), yet longitudinal studies show that when child care is unlimited, the mothers are likely to finish high school, obtain further training and the likelihood of second births was reduced (Buie, 1987; Marx, 1987).

The most effective programs for teen age parents offer child care and transportation in conjunction with parent education that includes easy access to medical and social services, reproductive information and family planning, instruction in prenatal and infant care and child development. Funding for many of these programs is already available through Federal, state and private programs for maternal and child health and school health care (Kirby & Lovick, 1987). Teen parents would be required to spend designated amounts of time in three areas: an academic program to complete high school, a vocational program with on site training (possible in the child care facility) and working in the child

care facility which would include parent education and child related classes.

Other students in the school: All students at the junior high or high school level should receive parent education (Hahn, 1987; Nash & Dunkle, 1989). Programs include sex education and contraceptive information, but young adults also need training in how to be parents. Many of them have never been around infants or young children and they should be able to observe young children as they develop, which is possible with an on site child care facility. This is very effective when in conjunction with family life classes, the child care facility provides, not only observational opportunities, but chances for "practice" with children under supervision of child care professionals (Buie, 1987; Hahn, 1987; Theilheimer, 1990).

Students who choose child care as a vocation should be able to work on a Child Development or similar certificate (Clarke-Stewart, 1987; Hahn, 1987; Theilheimer, 1990) while they complete their high school education. By providing training for child care workers, a staffing hierarchy (Weikart, 1989) is supported that supplies the beginning level of education for child care workers. When an adequate supply of these entry level child care workers are utilized along with certified teachers and other experienced and more educated early childhood professionals, the quality of the child care is elevated, and the profession can work toward higher wages. Staff budgets can be staggered to

obtain the maximum years of experience and training while maintaining high adult:child ratios (Godwin & Schrag, 1988; National Association for the Education of Young Children, 1990; Whitebook, Howes, Phillips, & Pemberton, 1989; Willer, 1990). Costs of these training programs for the entry level child care worker can be offset by job training programs such as the Comprehensive Employment and Training Act (CETA) or the Job Training Partnership Act (JTPA) (Marx, 1987; Moore, 1983; Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgeman, 1987).

Benefits to the school: Schools should provide services for all of their students, including those who become parents while still in school. Programs which address all of the needs of these students are the most effective. When teen pregnancy and dropouts are prevented, all levels of society benefit (Hahn, 1987). By having a child care facility on the school campus that can be used to demonstrate child care practices and for students to observe child development, students can learn first hand, before they have a child, what it is like to cope with parenthood (Hahn, 1987; Pagano, 1982; Theilheimer, 1990). The students enrolled in family life classes can be assigned regular hours in the child care center for work with small groups or individual child under supervision, therefore increasing the stimulation and interaction available to each child, while reducing the number of paid staff necessary for the desired adult:ratio (Hahn, 1987; Godwin & Schrag, 1988). The students enrolled in the vocational

programs described above also have opportunities for on the job training by serving internships that also reduce staff costs.

Schools will also benefit by allowing teachers to use the child care facility for their own children, which reduces stress and anxiety for them as parents and improves their performance in the classroom. Educators as parents can also provide role models for their students who need positive examples of parenting. Community relationships can be improved, the school is fostering the family structure when it supports the teachers and students who are parents. By enrolling other children from the community, the burden of cost to the school for the child care facility is offset (Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgeman, 1981) while fulfilling a need for quality child care in the community (Colletta, Gregg, Hadler, Lee, & Mekelburg, 1980; Galinsky, 1989).

Child care is an expensive investment (but worth it) (Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgeman, 1981) and utilizing the resources of public schools can be economical for the school system. Many schools have space that is unused (Kirby & Lovick, 1987) that frequently is heated by "all or none" heating systems and electricity for a few otherwise empty classrooms would be realistic. Support staff like janitors, cooks and secretaries are already present so additional cost for these services would also be minimal. Nutrition programs are already operating in the schools, meals for groups of young children should not overload this aspect of the school services and federal and state programs can be accessed to provide funds.

Schools will often benefit longitudinally by improved achievement test scores when better prepared children who attended the quality child care program enroll as regular students. In the past the children of teen parents have frequently been low achievers as they enter the intergenerational cycle of teen parents, and preschools have proven success at better preparing at "risk students" for the early grades as well as later life (Schweinhart, Koshel, & Bridgeman, 1981).

Government and Community: As discussed earlier the community will benefit through the schools, but other advantages are possible through more efficient use of public health, social and nutritional resources (Kirby & Lovick, 1987; Marx, 1987; Nash & Dunkle, 1989). Through coordination with the child care center, more qualifying young parents and their offspring can be served. Since better prenatal care and nutrition is available to the parents and the children, fewer babies will need to use the limited resources available, because mothers will complete their education and receive job training, they will join the work force instead of the welfare rolls. The monies spent on any aspect of this program will have multiple effects on the targeted population through more efficient use of funds.

By providing quality accessible child care for students, faculty and the community, a more productive work force is provided which can lead to positive economic results in the business and industry of the community. Community members who

become involved with the school, because of the child care facility will be more aware of the positive aspects of the school environment, so the school and community benefit again (Pagano, 1982). The benefits of the school parent education program will be felt through fewer teen pregnancies, the vocational education programs will provide trained workers for public and private child care facilities. Fewer dropouts will supply a better trained workforce who will not become welfare dependent.

Child care facility: The facility will benefit from a large supply of students who can supplement the trained early child care professionals. The professional teachers who can be paid according the the school system's regular salary schedule can also participate in the benefits package offered to the other teachers in the school system. This reduces the costs of salaries and benefits considerably for the child care facility since many small centers cannot offer benefits like paid sick days and health insurance because they have a staff that is too small to receive low rates. The school system, with many employees, can get lower rates and the cost is more managable for the child care center budget.

The child care profession in general will benefit from vocational programs and from increased knowledge parents and others in the community acquire from being involved at a quality child care facility.

Children: Not only do parents benefit from these courses, their children also profit from improved nutrition, better access to social services and health care and are less likely to be abused or neglected. These young families are less likely to be on welfare if the mother completes high school, and the children receive the benefits of preschool education and higher school achievement. All of the children enrolled in the child care facility will benefit from accessible, affordable quality child care. When parents are able to leave young children in an environment that is supportive and caring for the family unit, the family and the child care facility both profit.

Conclusions; Although such a proposed child care facility sounds like a magic solution, there are areas of concern that educators need to address. Child care and preschools, to have the positive results we desire, must be **quality** care. Therefore it is imperative to have experienced child care professionals directing the program. Continuity of child care givers must be a priority, so careful planning and scheduling is necessary to ensure familiarity of the children and the students who are involved in the program, and stable full-time trained early child care professionals must be the primary caregivers.

Other concerns that should be noted is the benefits of having community support for such a program. A careful awareness and education program must precede any program of this type to access valuable community support. Input from the community is

vital to the success of such a program and should be considered in the beginning stages of planning.

The most critical aspect of this proposal is to plan and supervise carefully and to carefully coordinate all possible resources so that students, children, schools, and the government and community all receive maximum benefit.

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